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AppropriationTestimony
Written testimony on HR6654

Honorable Senators and Representatives :

I am writing to you today to voice my vehement opposition to certain sections of HR6654.

In January, Rep Miner introduced HR5817, which proposed amending the state statutes to exempt concessions provided by the DEEP from the general requirement that such concessions be provided by the Board of Education and Services for the Blind. This bill rightfully died. However, the wording has been included into HR6654, which is on the Environment Committee's agenda for Friday's public hearing. To summarize, the proposed language would take away the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services first right of refusal to open vending or food service operations in state parks. In addition, the proposed changes call for the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection to issue a request for proposals for the operation of the food service facilities located in the state parks and forests under the custody and control of the commissioner.

Such a change would be unconscionable, as well as deleterious to the blind business entrepreneurs of Connecticut. The immediate effect would be to put three successful blind food service providers out of work. And for what? Does Hammonasset Beach really need a Subway or Burger King?

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) under BESB at DORS is absolutely the ideal example of the state giving people a hand-up rather than a hand-out. It uses 0 taxpayer dollars. It receives no state funding whatsoever. The program is funded completely by vending machine sales in certain state and municipal buildings. It pays the salaries and benefits of the field reps and trainers at BESB, as well as for the training and placement and maintenance of 40 to 50 blind vendor run facilities across the state.

Nationwide, working age blind people have a 70% unemployment rate. The BEP program is a zero cost solution to putting entrepreneurial blind people to work. Please don't allow this valuable program to be diminished in HR6654.

Thank you for your thoughtful reflection on this bill.

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